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DE RUEHDG #0484/01 1141843
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2638
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PRIORITY 2241
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0989
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY 1151
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON PRIORITY 2940
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR 0553
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 1275
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4983
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 1980
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0261
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMISTA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000484

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR BPREMONT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV KDEM PREL DR
SUBJECT: REFORMISTA PARTY LEADERSHIP BATTLE WORSENS SPLITS

REF: A. 08 SDO 1513
     ¶B. 08 SDO 1921
     ¶C. 08 SDO 1666
     ¶D. SDO 315
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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The once mighty Reformista Party has become so fractured that it cannot proceed with the selection of a new set of leaders. Indeed, one commentator referred to the party as an "archipelago of individual interests." New leadership was to have been selected last autumn, but this was postponed until March 2009. After some confusion, the selection process has been delayed yet again - without a firm deadline being set. While the party may not entirely disappear, it could be reduced to being just another minor party that swirls around President Fernandez. Or, some speculate, the party could one day become a vehicle for Fernandez to promote his wife's political career. Certainly, absent a real change in attitudes among the party's squabbling leaders, the Reformista Party will not contribute to the health of Dominican democracy as a responsible opposition party that offers reasonable alternatives to the President's wishes. End Summary.

What if they gave a party and nobody came?

¶2. (SBU) The efforts of the Social Christian Reform Party (PRSC) to revitalize itself have been going on since the party was crushed in the May 2008 Dominican presidential elections (reftels A - B). After inconclusive efforts in the Autumn of 2008, the Reformista Party, as the PRSC is also called, planned to select new leadership by February or March ¶2009. However, divisions within the party worsened over the intervening months, not least over the question of whether the new leadership should be agreed upon by consensus or elected in nationwide primaries.

¶3. (SBU) At the beginning of March, the President of the Party (Federico Autun Batlle) and General Secretary (Victor Gomez Casanova) called for "General Internal Primaries" to be held on March 29, 2009. Certainly, the party's statutes required action by then, but this move led to cries of foul by those interested in a consensus approach, such as powerful

Santiago mayor Jose
Enrique Sued (reftel C). In February, the Executive
Commission of the PRSC had approved the selection of the
leadership by consensus, in hopes of reunifying the party. At
that time, it looked like Sued would emerge as First VP of
the PRSC, while Congressman Victor "Ito" Bisono (reftels)
would become the new PRSC General Secretary.

¶4. (SBU) Then, in mid-March a group of ex-PRSC officials from
several provinces announced that they would not return to the
party's fold. Instead, they would continue to "follow Leonel
Fernandez." Among this group is Walter Musa, mayor of Puerto
Plata, and the DR Ambassador to Colombia, Angel Lockwood. In
so doing, they are emulating the lead of the Foreign
Minister, Carlos Morales Troncoso - a top PRSC leader, and
now a key member of the Fernandez administration.

¶5. (U) The internal divisions next led to an announcement,
days before the planned March 29 event, that the process of
leadership selection would be suspended. Shortly thereafter,
a party official and member of its Organizing Committee
indicated that an effort would be made to convoke an
"Extraordinary Convention" of the PRSC on April 19, at which
some 1,300 delegates should approve changes to the party's
statutes, thereby paving the way for some kind of leadership
selection on or about May 3, 2009. (Note: The Extraordinary
Convention has now been re-scheduled for June 7, by which
time DR legislators should be finished changing the
constitution. End Note.)

¶6. (U) Reformista optimism following that announcement, if
any, did not last long: On March 25, the Central Elections
Board (JCE) declared that the PRSC would not be among those
parties sharing a substantial portion of the government funds
that go to support political campaigns in the Dominican
Republic. According to Dominican law, 80 percent of
government-sourced campaign financing must go the party or
parties that receive at least five percent of the vote. The
other 20 percent are shared by all other parties. In the
2008 presidential elections, the PRSC received 4.59 percent
of the vote. The PRSC had petitioned for that figure to be
"rounded up," and also pointed to the 15 percent of the vote
it got in congressional and mayoral elections in 2006, but
the JCE ruled against the request.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) One political commentator, Juan Bolivar Diaz,
surveyed the wreckage in a recent editorial and concluded,
"The prospects for the PRSC are (poor): not recuperation, but
more dispersion, since many of its leaders are scrambling for
the benefits that the new (Fernandez) constitution offers."
Yet Fernandez needs some PRSC support to ensure that his
desired reforms receive the necessary two-thirds vote in
Congress (reftel D). So, Diaz indicated, the PRSC - or a
significant part thereof - will agree to ally itself with the
PLD in legislative and municipal elections to be held 14
months from now.

¶8. (SBU) We would argue that instead of seeking short-term
alliances that facilitate patronage, PRSC leaders would
better serve Dominican democracy if they reconstituted the
PRSC as a party with principles and programs. End Comment.
BULLEN